





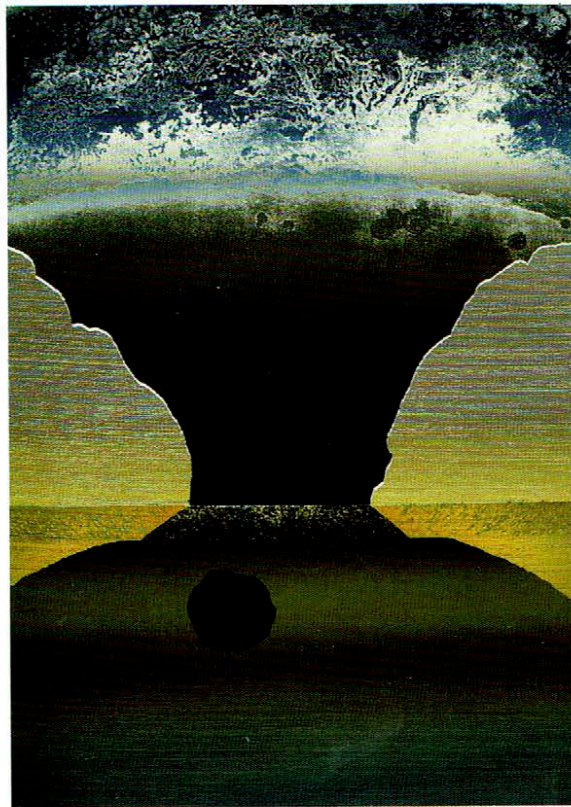
# June Wayne

ART AND SCIENCE

Jay Belloli

"My work method is the scientific method," June Wayne asserted.<sup>1</sup> The extraordinary advances in space exploration and genetics made during the mid-twentieth century were essential to Wayne's artistic process and art, and her exploration of these new discoveries was unique. Her scientific knowledge came both from her reading and through her personal connections with scientists. In the 1950s she became friends with Harrison Brown, a nuclear physicist who taught at the California Institute of Technology.<sup>2</sup> Friendships or associations with other scientists followed, including a number of contacts at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which became the world center for space exploration in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Even the Southern California environment contributed to Wayne's interest in space science. "The quality of light we have here. . . . The vast expanses of sky. . . . I think that took me off the earth and got me interested in space."<sup>4</sup>

Wayne began her artistic involvement with scientific information in 1965, the year after the Jet Propulsion Laboratory began its exploration of the solar system.<sup>5</sup> *At Last a Thousand* (p. 20), a print that she made at Tamarind Lithography Workshop that year, marked her move into art influenced by the cosmos.



*Tenth Wave*, 1972  
Cat. 36

### *Cosmic Imagery*

Wayne would explore celestial imagery for more than four decades.<sup>6</sup> And she would take inspiration from science for the rest of her career. As Robert P. Conway notes, Wayne “realized that the cosmic images that had inspired generations of poets had been superseded by a new vision of the universe that scientists were now discovering.”<sup>7</sup> She depicted scientific discoveries in poetic rather than illustrative ways. “I began to realize rather early that the more scientifically grounded I was, the less aesthetic the result,” she said. “When it comes to the work itself, too close relationship to the facts works against the metaphysical and aesthetic potentials.”<sup>8</sup>

Wayne’s first major works with scientific subjects resulted in one of the

most productive and technically venturesome collaborations in modern American printmaking. From late 1973 to 1989 Wayne and Tamarind master printer Ed Hamilton produced more than one hundred lithographic editions.<sup>9</sup> Her space-inspired subjects led to entirely new ways of formally and technically depicting movement and depth. The celestial sphere has a sense of distance that is completely different from what we experience on earth. Without any horizon lines or understandable progression from foreground to background, space opens to infinity.

In lithographic series such as *Stellar Winds* (1978–79; pls. 43, 44), *Solar Flares* (1981–82; pls. 53, 54), and *My Palomar* (1983–85), Wayne investigated qualities of motion and depth. She also accomplished technical breakthroughs. For example, *Stellar Winds* involved a type of oxidation on the aluminum plate called *peau de crapaud* (literally, “skin of a toad”), which created an exceptionally detailed and complex visual texture in each lithograph. To portray the sun’s corona in *Solar Flares*, Wayne concentrated on capturing the fugitive color of yellow and found that she could make it work only by surrounding it with other hues, some of them in full brilliance. *My Palomar*, a lithographic series that she



wanted to be like “freeze-frames in a film,” took its title from the Palomar Observatory, north of San Diego, once the site of the world’s largest telescope.<sup>10</sup>

### *Genetics*

Moving from macrocosm to microcosm, Wayne produced the Burning Helix Series (1970; pls. 21–23), inspired by the double-helix forms of the DNA and RNA molecules. She was influenced by James Watson’s 1968 book on his and Francis Crick’s discovery in 1953 of the structure of the DNA molecule. Wayne declared: “I was fascinated about the genes’ total indifference to the individual. . . . The paradox about knowing that much about ourselves, yet nonetheless being at the mercy of this system of molecules.”<sup>11</sup> The shapes in *Dusty Helix* (1970; pl. 21) were loosely based on diagrams of the six-sided modules in each DNA helix.<sup>12</sup> *Burning Helix* (1970; pl. 22) was prompted by a DNA amino acid sequence.<sup>13</sup>

### *Waves and Fingerprints*

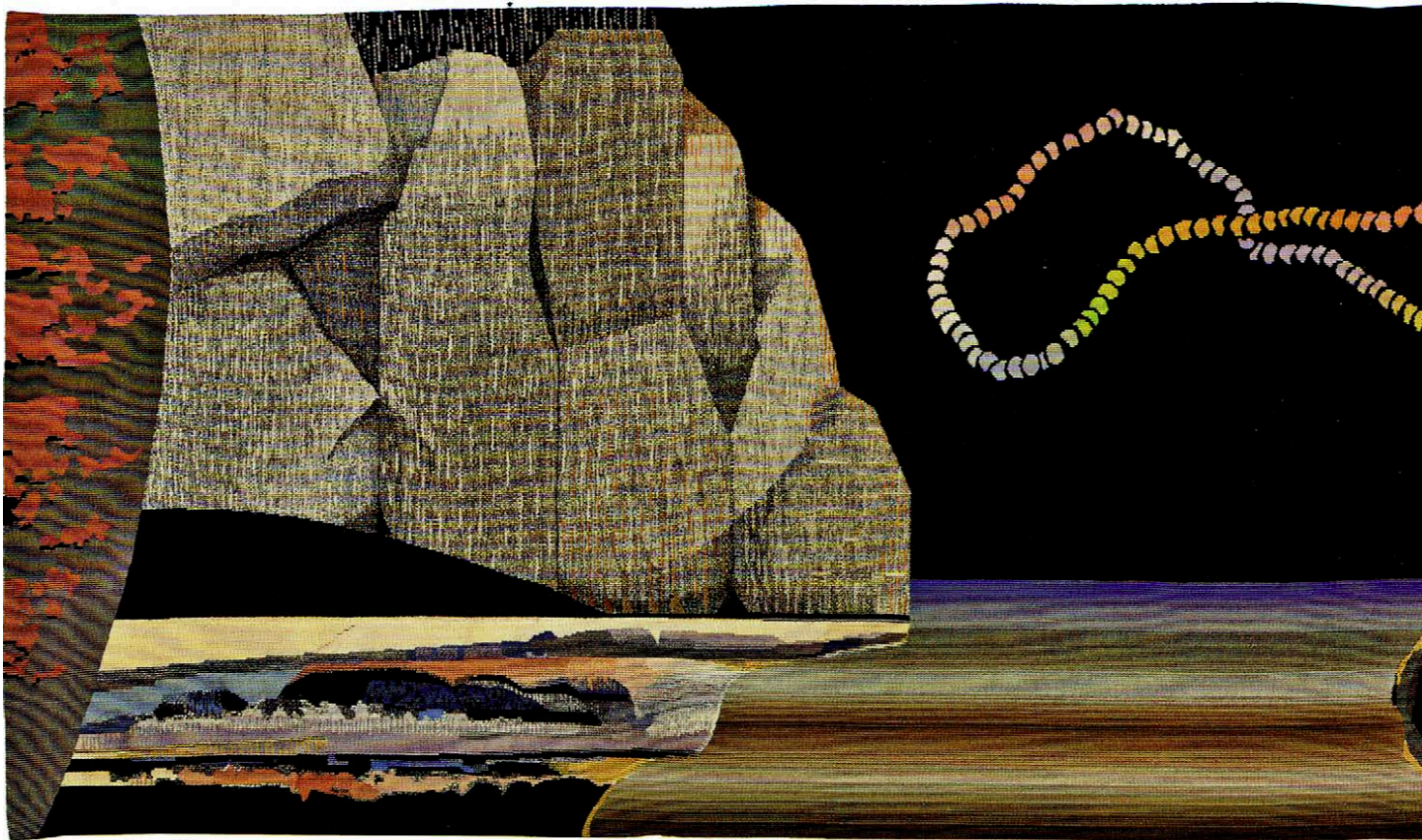
In her lithographs of the early 1970s exploring wave imagery (p. 22; pls. 24, 34), Wayne worked at a much larger scale. To create the spontaneous backgrounds in these lithographs, she used frottage, a technique that involves putting a piece of thin paper over a rough surface and rubbing a soft pencil over it.<sup>14</sup> Many of the tidal waves appear monumental. Wayne intentionally “cropped all but the closest ‘action’” of the waves to make them enormous.<sup>15</sup> Some of the Wave lithographs were inspired by Katsushika Hokusai’s famous woodcut *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (ca. 1830–32).

At first glance the Visa Series (1972–78; pls. 31–33) suggests a return to the microcosm. Based on images of Wayne’s own fingerprint, the works speak of the genetic uniqueness of this tiny part of the human body. Fingerprints have also been used to identify hunted people, a very sensitive issue for a woman of Jewish heritage. “I was aware of and frightened of the Hitler era,” she admitted. Wayne magnified the image of the fingerprint significantly so that, in macrocosmic terms, “it would loom up like a planet.”<sup>16</sup>

### *Television and Film*

In the 1970s, an incredibly productive decade for the artist, Wayne also turned to film and video. In 1972–73, in an effort to bring contemporary art to the public, she hosted an eight-part series for KCET, the public television station in Los Angeles. *The June Wayne Show* featured different guest artists, including Françoise Gilot and Louise Nevelson, as well as the feminist theorist Ti-Grace Atkinson.<sup>17</sup> Wayne also produced the film *Four Stones for Kanemitsu*, documenting the creation of a four-color lithograph by the artist Matsumi (Mike) Kanemitsu. In 1974 the film was nominated for an Academy Award for best documentary short.<sup>18</sup>





*On Verra*, 1972  
Tapestry  
48 x 192 inches  
Collection of  
KCETLink

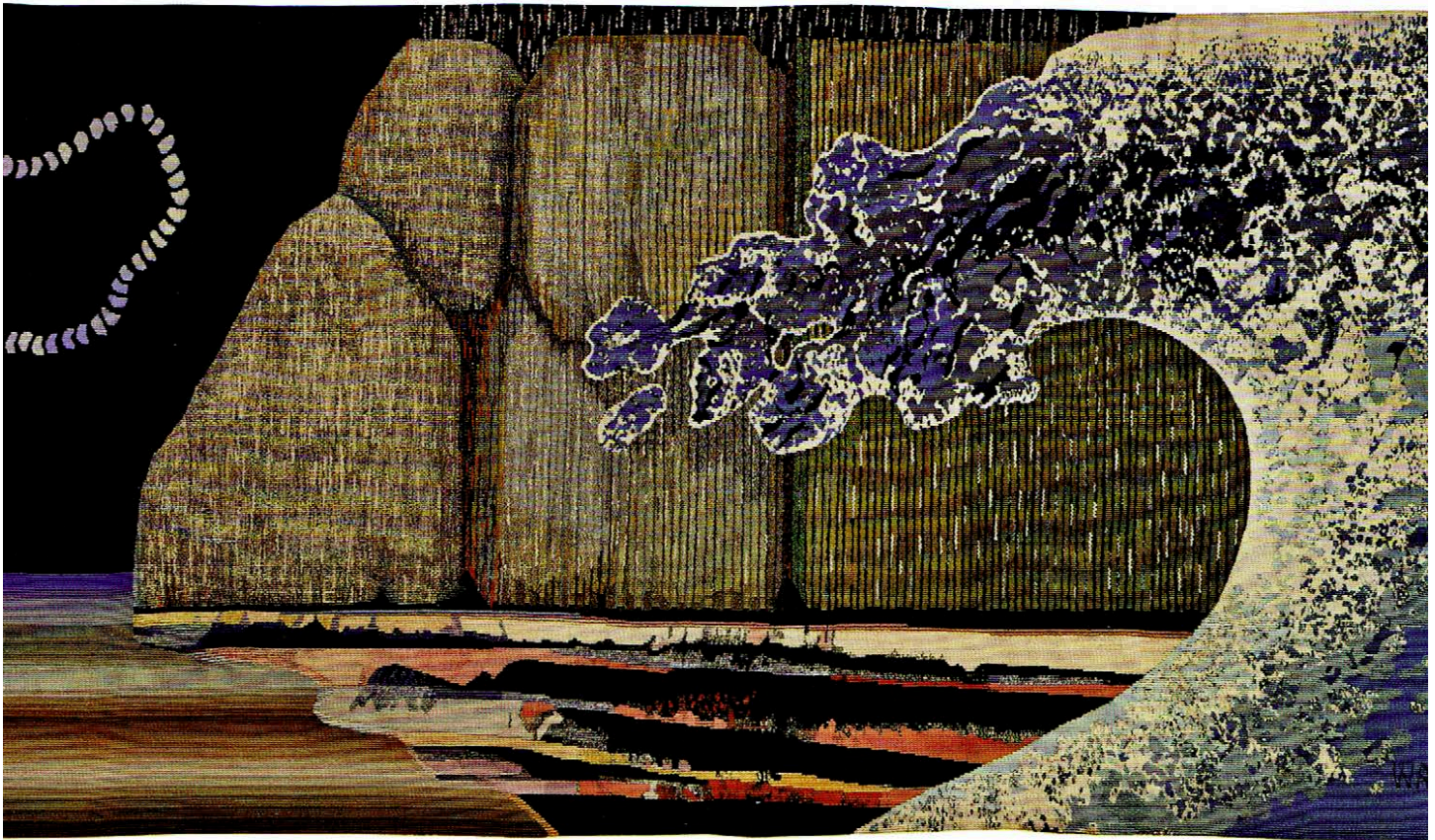
### *Tapestries*

During the same decade, Wayne made another significant shift in medium: she began to work in tapestry. While in Paris in the 1950s, she became friends with Madeline Jarry, the principal inspector of the famous Gobelins tapestry manufactory. Around 1970 Wayne began to explore the medium. The artist was attracted to tapestry because its “methodology echoed both Ben-Day dots and computer grids [and] it offered me a type of image-making through the accretion of modules that I had found in the pores of lithographic stone.”<sup>19</sup>

In the dozens of remarkable tapestries that she created, Wayne turned to images from her scientifically themed lithographs: the cosmos, DNA, tidal waves, and fingerprints. The lithographs, however, functioned only as a point of departure for the monumental woven works to come. The artist transformed the small-scale print images to large-scale tapestries by creating cartoons and making precise decisions on colors and shading. Unlike many artists, Wayne was involved in every aspect of the tapestry production process.

*On Verra* (1972; above)—the title is French for “We will see”—is Wayne’s tapestry masterpiece. Monumental in its sixteen-foot width, the work brings together three of the artist’s scientific themes: DNA, tidal waves, and the cosmos. The images woven into the tapestry include a central DNA helix floating in a night sky, a sunlit sea flanked by





segmented rocks, an “errant meteor” impacting the water below the helix, and a huge tidal wave rising on the right.<sup>20</sup> The range from impressive large forms to ravishing details is extraordinary. Wayne’s tapestries, completed between 1971 and 1974, are a testament to the scope of her art and the exceptional quality of the results in whatever medium she explored.

### *Paintings*

In 1984 Wayne began creating a series of remarkable paintings called *Cognitos* (p. 26; pls. 55, 56), a play on the French philosopher René Descartes’s dictum “*Cogito ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am). The artist chose the title because she wanted to create a sense of something known, a sense of recognition without specific identification.<sup>21</sup> What is specific in the paintings is that they were named for Wayne’s family and close friends. Appropriately the most monumental of these paintings was titled *Anki* (1984; p. 26), the name in French of her deeply loved husband, Hank.

Many in this series were repainted on earlier canvases that were built up with thick, textured mixtures of gesso, gelatin, and paper devised by the experienced papermaker Douglas Howell. The surfaces of a number of the *Cognitos* were covered with silver or gold leaf. Still thinking of the cosmos, Wayne noted that the metallic leaf made each painting “a reflective source; it would change as you walked around it. . . . I thought of







these pictures as pieces of planets, the way they might look if you could go from one planet to another.”<sup>22</sup>

In a series of related abstract paintings begun in 1989 (pls. 58–64), the artist used a modular arrangement of styrene packing “peanuts.” The resulting works were a further evolution of Wayne’s long involvement with perception and ambiguity. The quality of light reflecting from the styrene was even more complex than the metal leaf in the *Cognitos*. In the last group of styrene-covered paintings, the *Quake Series* (1990s; pl. 64), Wayne was concerned with the surface of our planet. These were created during a period of major Southern California earthquakes, including the devastating 1994 Northridge quake. In these works the small pieces of styrene imply rocky geological units, often jumbled or broken.

### *Late Works*

Wayne continued to make lithographs throughout the 1980s and 1990s, completing her extraordinary work with Ed Hamilton in 1989. *My Self* (1985; pl. 57) depicts the artist’s face and hand, appropriately, at the edge of a cosmological black-and-white background.

Wayne resisted exploring the possibilities of digital printmaking until the new millennium. One digital print, *Sects in the City* (2006; pl. 69), comments on the growth of “rapture” religions, which she believed “were undermining the separation of church and state in the United States.”<sup>23</sup> She also considered such churches repressively antifemale.<sup>24</sup> The artist created her last works with her studio assistant Shuichi “Shui” Sonokawa. Together they made collages from colored lithograph test proofs and digital images of Wayne and her assistants. The finest and most affecting of these include photographs of her signature thick-rimmed glasses, an appropriate symbol for an artist who had always been passionate about issues of perception.

Beginning in 1965, Wayne’s fascination with new developments in space science and genetics completely transformed her art. As she said, “I’m more interested in what is going to happen than what has happened already.”<sup>25</sup> Wayne even felt that her working process was influenced by her involvement with these rapidly changing disciplines.

Science was central to Wayne’s art over the last forty years of her life. Given her extraordinary intelligence and courage, the aesthetic results were spectacular: a fifteen-year lithographic collaboration with Ed Hamilton in which “she was, in her own estimate, at the top of her game”;<sup>26</sup> an Academy Award-nominated film; some of the greatest tapestries of the second half of the twentieth century; and three series of paintings that explored that medium in an entirely new way. One can only marvel at how June Wayne approached her art and at how she dealt with the broader issues of art and of the world.



## Notes

1. June Wayne, quoted in Betty Ann Brown, *Afternoons with June: Stories of June Wayne's Art and Life* (New York: Midmarch Arts, 2012), 138.
2. *Ibid.*, 58.
3. Wayne had a particularly close friendship with Al Hibbs, a physicist working at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the public "voice of JPL," and with Theresa Bailey, a librarian at that institution.
4. Wayne, quoted in Brown, *Afternoons with June*, 57.
5. See *Twenty-Five Years of Space Photography*, exh. cat. (Pasadena, CA: Baxter Art Gallery, California Institute of Technology; New York: Norton, 1985), 112–13.
6. Robert P. Conway, *June Wayne: The Art of Everything: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1936–2006* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 173.
7. *Ibid.*, 279.
8. Wayne, quoted *ibid.*, 187.
9. Robert P. Conway, "June Wayne en Collage," in *June Wayne*, 8.
10. Conway, *June Wayne*, 325. For a discussion of the Palomar Observatory, see Patrick Moore, ed., *The International Encyclopedia of Astronomy* (New York: Orion, 1987), 276.
11. Wayne, quoted in Conway, *June Wayne*, 187.
12. *Ibid.*, 189.
13. *Ibid.*, 190.
14. *Ibid.*, 203. On frottage, see Peter Murray and Linda Murray, *The Penguin Dictionary of Art and Artists* (London: Penguin, 1983), 148.
15. Conway, *June Wayne*, 212.
16. Wayne, quoted *ibid.*, 221.
17. Brown, *Afternoons with June*, 145.
18. *Ibid.*, 146.
19. Wayne, quoted *ibid.*, 147.
20. Conway, *June Wayne*, 217.
21. *Ibid.*, 331.
22. Wayne, quoted *ibid.*, 329.
23. *Ibid.*, 407.
24. Brown, *Afternoons with June*, 125.
25. Wayne, quoted *ibid.*, 156.
26. Conway, *June Wayne*, 11.



